

MULTILITERACIES PEDAGOGY IN RAISING GENDER AWARENESS THROUGH SUE MONK KIDD'S *THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of the Multiliteracy Pedagogy approach promoted by the New London Group (1996) in raising gender awareness through *The Secret Life of Bees* movie, which was adapted from Sue Monk Kidd's novel of the same name (2001). The participants of this research are seventeen fifth semester English Education students and an English lecturer. Using qualitative data from observation and an online questionnaire. The findings revealed that through *The Secret Life of Bees*, the four elements of Multiliteracies Pedagogy are well implemented in the classroom, which in turn could raise the students' awareness in relation to gender issues. The learning activities in each element of multiliteracies pedagogy provides the students not only the situation to experience the issue but also the discussion and other learning activities which invite them to critically explore their ideas about gender issues. It shows that multiliteracies pedagogy which is meaningful in raising gender awareness. The students give positive responses toward the use of multiliteracies pedagogy to raise gender awareness as seen from the result of the questionnaire that the students are excited, comfortable, and confident in sharing their critical ideas regarding gender issues after watching the movie.

KEYWORDS: Multiliteracy Pedagogy; Gender Awareness; *The Secret Life of Bees*

ABSTRAK

Dalam proses pembelajaran pendidik seharusnya dapat membawa karya sastra sebagai materi ajar yang disesuaikan dengan konsep pengajaran abad ke 21. Penerapan pendekatan Pedagogi Multiliterasi (*Multiliteracies Pedagogy*) yang digagas pertama kali oleh *New London Group* (1996) melalui film *The Secret Life of Bees* untuk membangun kesadaran gender yang diadopsi dari sebuah novel dengan judul yang sama karya Sue Monk Kidd (2001). Subjek penelitian ini adalah tujuh belas mahasiswa semester lima pada program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif untuk menganalisis data hasil observasi dan kuesioner. Peneliti menerapkan pendekatan *Multiliteracies Pedagogy* yang terdiri dari empat aspek, yaitu; a) *situated practice*, b) *overt instruction*, c) *critical framing*, dan d) *transformed practice*. Hasil penelitian memperlihatkan aktifitas pembelajaran yang merefleksikan empat aspek pedagogi multiliterasi tersebut dalam membangun kesadaran gender menggunakan film *The Secret Life of Bees*. Selain itu, mahasiswa memberikan respon positif terkait penggunaan pedagogi multiliterasi untuk membangun kesadaran gender melalui film *The Secret Life of Bees*.

Kata Kunci: Pedagogi Multiliterasi, Kesadaran Gender, *The Secret Life of Bees*

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INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century requires educators to integrate technology in the learning process. The implementation of technology in learning activities can be carried out in the form of learning media, learning models, learning approaches, and learning strategies chosen by the educators.

The concept of multiliteracies is not language dominant. It is made up of multiple literacies which are always changing, accommodating the changes of society, culture, and technology. In this case, multiliteracies enable capacities to adjust with change and effectively contribute to all aspects of society.

The four elements of multiliteracies pedagogy relies on the idea that humans possess their knowledge in a diverse context of culture, linguistic, and social. Those elements are Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. In providing the first element of multiliteracies pedagogy, experiences that are meaningful for students should be available in the initial learning activities. The students, then, could relate it to their experiences either inside or outside the classroom. Further, the Situated Practice enables the students to contextualize their knowledge into the practice. In the context of gender issues, this element is well implemented through providing a discourse or a situation in which the issue is raised through the use of particular teaching media.

Overt instruction does not necessarily refer to direct transmission, drills, or dictation. It covers all teachers' interventions in the learning activities. In addition, it is a kind of collaborative work involving both teacher and student, in which the students might accomplish a task more complex than they can accomplish on their own. Overt instruction also refers to the students' use of metalanguages. It is a language used to generalize the form, content, and function of the discourses of practice.

Another element of multiliteracies pedagogy is Critical Framing which requires

the students to stand back from what they are learning and to view it in relation to its context. This stage of multiliteracies pedagogy facilitates the students' critical thinking. This is because they have to critically argue the issue considering the facts in reality in their social environment. The last element of multiliteracies pedagogy is the Transformed Practice. It is closely related to recreating what the students have learned in another discourse or situation either in a personal or academic environment.

One of the important goals of education is introducing as well as establishing learners into existing norms, values, and power structures. It also includes a process of expanding human capacities to develop an intended condition of society. Therefore, the gender issue can be incorporated into education to create a society where male and female are viewed, treated, and constructed equally.

The Global Monitoring Reports on gender equality by UNESCO in 2003 reported the difficulty of achieving gender equality goals. This report revealed not only that females were globally illiterate but also that 54 countries in the world were not likely to achieve gender equality in accessing education by the target date of 2005.

Research has proven that the improvement of educational quality by taking into consideration some aspects including the physical environment, learning materials, training of teachers and class size, is beneficial both for girls and boys. Research by Gibson (in Unterhalter) has also suggested that teacher training should include gender awareness as an integral component of their education.

One of the women's empowerment in education as what has been suggested by education activists implies stimulating critical thinking. This idea will be in line with what multiliteracies pedagogy concerns. The learning activities in the Critical Framing could be designed to what level of critical thinking is required for the students when they are asked to share their opinions and ideas about the gender inequality in the movie and

in their real environment.

There are previous researches that investigated either multiliteracies pedagogy or gender awareness in education. Research focusing on how teachers apply multiliteracies pedagogy has been conducted in the last ten years (Mills, Yaman, Skerrett, Lavoie, Lenters). The result of those studies explore how teachers apply multiliteracies pedagogy in their classrooms.

In the last five years, the issue of multiliteracies pedagogy has been discussed in relation to technology or online learning context. Pires, for example, examines online inquiry reading through multiliteracies pedagogy approach.

Santori & Smith also conducted a study about teaching and learning using iPads to promote dialogic construction of multiliteracies. In addition, studies that use multiliteracies as theoretical framework to analyze either learning materials or other elements needed for teaching and learning process have also been conducted. Using multiliteracies framework, Paesani further examined foreign language instructional materials. The study reveals an overwhelming emphasis on the knowledge process of experiencing. Khadka, on the other hand, not only investigates the fundamental literacies required in the global world but also proposes a broad based multiliteracies framework for potential writing pedagogy.

Although the number of research has proven, then suggested, to the benefits of the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy for the teachers' learning objectives, there are studies that doubt the use of multiliteracies pedagogy as proposed by NLG. One of them is a study by Kiss & Mizusawa which proposed an extensive use of examination-centered practices based on functional literacy, routine procedures and standardization, rather than a pedagogy that promotes social equity and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Using film and other literary works in education is crucial in constructing the understanding of varied representations of masculinities. *The Secret Life of Bees* the movie

is adapted from the novel written by Sue Monk Kidd, an American writer. This is her first novel published by Viking in 2002. It has been on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than two and half years. Surprisingly, this novel also has been translated into over 36 languages and won numerous other awards. For over a decade, the novel was produced on stage, and in 2008 it was adapted into a movie which won a lot of awards. The movie shows the real condition of South Carolina in 1964 that almost reflects white racism and gender issues. Gender inequality and violence are factors in the low participation and academic achievement of girls in South Africa. Bhana discovered in her research with schoolgirls in a township in South Africa that while the girls suffered gender inequality and violence, the social injustices encompassing race and class increased their vulnerabilities and worsened their discrimination. However, women instructors in a rural setting in South Africa understood that gender inequality was the root cause of gender violence, hence it is critical that gender inequality be examined to better understand how it contributes to gender violence. This condition is reflected by Lily in *The Secret Life of Bees*, a white girl who runs away from home to live with a black woman who works as an independent bee-keeper and honey-maker with many of her sisters.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. It explores not only how multiliteracy pedagogy is applied to raise students' gender awareness through Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*, but also the students' response regarding it. The data is collected through observation and questionnaire. The subject of the research is the lecturer at the private university in East Java and seventeen students who take Introduction to Literature course. The data are analyzed descriptively using the theory

of multiliteracy pedagogy which comprises 4 elements. Those are Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. The data from the students' questionnaire is analyzed to explore their response regarding the use of multiliteracies pedagogy to raise their gender awareness through Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The data from observation and questionnaire are analyzed to get the answer of research questions. The findings, then, are elaborated through the use of relevant theories and previous studies. The answers for each research question are firstly presented by describing how multiliteracies pedagogy is implemented in the classroom to raise gender awareness. Then the description continues to answer the second research question focusing on the students' responses towards the use of multiliteracies pedagogy to raise gender awareness through *The Secret Life of Bees*.

1. The Multiliteracy Pedagogy to Raise Gender Awareness through Sue Monk Kidd's The Secret Life of Bees

The application of the multiliteracy pedagogy model is carried out in the "Introduction to Literature" course for the fifth semester students of the English department. The subject of this study was seventeen students. The four elements of multiliteracy pedagogy; situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice are applied during the learning process. The implementation of this approach is conducted in two meetings. The first meeting is focusing on the application of the model and the second meeting is stressing on digging up information about the student's responses. In the first meeting the lecturer conducted situated practice and overt instruction. Meanwhile in the second meeting the lecturer carried out the critical framing stage and transformed practice.

In the situated practice stage, the lecturer draws the students' experiences and connects learning with what they already know dealing with *The Secret Life of Bees* movie. Teacher plays *The Secret Life of Bees* film followed by the instruction to observe it deeply. Next, the lecturer asks some questions to the students dealing with the story in the movie in order to explore the students' understanding. Through the use of situated practice in the classroom, educators promote student interaction, discussion, and sharing of ideas dealing with the Secret Life of Bees. It shows the example of how literacy is a social practice, where students are able to develop their knowledge through relating and connecting to their prior knowledge with the movie. The students are excited to watch it during the learning process because they learn multiple perspectives and ideas of their classmates.

Next, overt instruction is conducted by the lecturer through facilitating students' development of meta-cognitive in direct and explicit lessons through some instruction to formulate the hypothesis of gender issue after they watch the movie. Here, the lecturer introduced the gender issues that will be correlated to the students' assignment after watching the movie. It helps the students to develop an awareness of what, how, and why they are learning about gender issues through the movie.

Critical framing is reflected by the lecturer's activities to help students to recognize the contexts of their learning by writing their ideas. The students relate what they learn from the movie, specifically the gender issues, to broader contexts to develop their critical thinking ability related to gender issues. When writing their ideas, students should incorporate their interests and experiences from their family, friends, popular culture, social media, and language. Students' observation and analysis of significant idea communication strategies in classrooms and communities was encouraged by the lecturer. Through this activity, the students step back from what they have learned,

critique their learning, and extend and apply their learning in new contexts.

In the next stage of multiliteracies pedagogy, the teacher guides students and allows the student to include the other three elements of the multiliteracies pedagogy as they transform their knowledge. It brings multimodal learning experiences for students. As what has been stated by Abrams and Nabhan multimodal learning facilitates the use of modern media and modes developed to take advantage of different multimedia and device technology.

The activity included in transformed practice is applied when the lecturer guides the learners to creatively apply what they learned into practice. The students are required to compose a reflective writing related to what they have learned from the movie. Their reflective writings are written based on their understanding of gender awareness through *The Secret Life of Bees*. In this case, their reflective writing is the product of the assignment that has to be submitted at the end of the learning process. At the end of the learning activity of the second meeting, the lecturer gives a questionnaire in the form of Google Form in order to know the students' perspective of gender awareness.

Based on the learning activity observation, the application of multiliteracy pedagogy is progressing well which is proven by the fact that the students successfully achieve the learning objectives. It has been proven that all of the students are able to produce reflective writing. In addition, their writing is not only reporting of what they have watched but also critically relates the issue in their society. Moreover, it shows that the application of multiliteracy pedagogy can be done by lecturers to integrate literary works as multimodal in learning activity.

2. The Students' Response toward the Use of Multiliteracy Pedagogy in Raising Gender Awareness through Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

Based on the data from the questionnaire, it could be highlighted and explored the

students' response in relation to the use of multiliteracy pedagogy in raising gender awareness by the use of the movie *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd. The students show positive response, which is then elaborated in detail in the following descriptions.

The students get a better understanding regarding the gender issue as reflected in the movie. This understanding contributes to their awareness in relation to gender issues surrounding them. As what has already been stated in the previous description regarding the learning activities representing Critical Framing, as one of the elements in multiliteracies pedagogy, the students are asked to speak about the gender issues that they observed in the movie then relate them into its practices in their society.

The students' positive response could also be seen from their excitement to speak about gender issues after watching the movie. After watching the movie, the students are asked to present about what they have watched. The students are required not only to present the movie in general, but also to explore the values behind the movie. Although the message of the movie is not only related to gender issues, the students' presentation is mostly about gender issues. In addition, the students are excited and open to talk about their ideas and opinions regarding the gender issues that happen in their society. This process is good for raising the gender awareness among the students at the university level.

The students' excitement in discussing gender issues is closely related to whether the students are comfortable or uncomfortable discussing gender issues in front of the class. The data from the questionnaire shows that there are two students who are not comfortable talking about gender issues among the male students. They further assert that they are not confident enough to talk about sensitive issues in front of the class. However, the majority of students explicitly state that it is alright to talk about gender issues among their friends, either male or female. Creating a comfortable atmosphere of

learning, just as a real social setting, could trigger the students' participation. The students being allowed to talk about their ideas freely without any personal judgment could be also a helpful tool in creating such a learning environment. What students bring to classrooms could not be ignored as a consequence of their participation in a myriad of other social contexts.

The students' excitement, comfort, as well as confidence bring them to the active engagement of the discussion. They actively participate in the discussion by sharing their ideas freely either orally or in writing. In addition, they also accept and respond to other students' opinions regarding gender issues even though the opinion does not seem reliable for them. At this stage, students became critical consumers of the information they encountered through multiple forms of media.

Through such lively discussion, the students get more curious about gender issues. This leads to the exploration of the issue. This response can not be separated from the element of multiliteracies pedagogy, that is Transformed Practice. Transformed Practice could be used as a way to explore the students' ideas regarding gender issues. Developing awareness of concepts, in this case related to gender issues, guided students' conscious awareness, engagement, and control over their learning.

CONCLUSION

The multiliteracy pedagogy that consists of four components; Situated practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice, is used effectively in the learning process as evidenced by the learning activities in the classroom. It has been demonstrated that every student is not only experiencing the issue through the movie but also further capable of producing reflective writing based on *The Secret Life of Bees*. The students' critical thinking is also exposed when they are asked to relate it with their context regarding gender issues. Additionally, a literary work can be used to teach

students about gender issues as depicted in a literary work. Literary works, as film, could increase the students' gender awareness by engaging with the actual social situation through *The Secret Life of Bees*. Interestingly, the students also show a positive response as indicated by their excitement, confidence, as well as their comfort when they are required to present their ideas among other students in the class.

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